Dr. Koh- Chih Tung, UIS Regional Advisor and Head of the AIMS Unit, UNESCO Bangkok, Dr. Cliff Meyers, Regional Education Advisor, UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to represent the Ministry of Education of Thailand to be here today to welcome delegates from the region to the **East and South East Asia - EFA Mid Decade Assessment Capacity Building Workshop**. May I extend my warm welcome to all of you who have come from abroad to Thailand. I can see that many of you are veterans to the EFA which confirms me of the long-standing commitment of countries in the region to the achievement of EFA.

This workshop is just one of many initiatives organized through the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Bureau for Education and the UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Office which helps to strengthen national and regional responses to EFA. Over the next five days, an interactive program, offering a variety of sessions will provide opportunities for exchange to facilitate the preparation of the national report on EFA Mid Decade Assessment.
If I use Thailand as an example, I know that a great deal has happened since the initial conference in Jomtien and the Mid Decade Assessment in Dakar. We have, for example, made considerable progress with regard to increasing access for all. There has been a steady increase in gross enrolments in primary education of school-aged population from 93.49 percent in 1990 to over 100 percent in 2004. Part of this can be attributed to initiatives which have helped parents to send their children to school. For instance, the bicycle lending project which is particularly offered to those in remote areas and school lunch programs offered in primary schools. We have also facilitated the participation of disadvantaged groups by actively encouraging schools to adopt an inclusive policy. Hence, we now see physically impaired students in regular schools. In addition, welfare schools continue to provide opportunities to members of ethnic groups, reaching the previously unreached.

Furthermore, much has been done to narrow the gaps between the haves and have-nots. We have been working towards strengthening networks to facilitate the sharing of resources, which include equipment, technology, as well as personnel. In addressing the digital divide, the Ministry of Education, Thailand is committed to installing thousands of computers to ensure that all schools nationwide will have these facilities by the end of 2006. It is expected that even those students from some of our remote communities will be able to learn, connect and interact through the Internet.

Thailand recognizes that while it is important to get people in school, we must also ensure that the education they receive is relevant
to their needs and will open doors and provide opportunities that will improve their quality of life. To a certain extent, the introduction of a new curriculum has brought about improvements. This is an on-going process and our efforts to bring about positive change now include the integration of the core concepts of sustainable development, and the Sufficiency Economy Theory, initiated by His Majesty the King. This will not only develop our citizens’ intellectual capacities but will also take into account their physical, spiritual and emotional well-being. We aim to promote values that will strengthen civil society and lead to more responsible, moral and ethical behavior.

However, it is not only a matter of curriculum but delivery and how well students are taught that will make the difference. Teaching/learning reform through the training and professional development of existing teachers remains high priority. Of equal importance is the need for incentives to attract new people into the teaching profession. Regarding the problem of teacher shortage, special consideration will be given to solving our immediate problems in key academic subject areas including: mathematics, science and technology, and English language. Our plan is to strengthen school networks which can facilitate the sharing of resources, equipment or teachers.

Many of these issues are not unique to Thailand and it is essential that we continue to work together to strengthen national and regional responses to the achievement of EFA. The EFA Mid Decade Assessment provides opportunity to reflect carefully, critically and scientifically on the results that have been obtained in efforts for education for all. Significantly, it also provides an arena to reflect on related commitments such as the eradication of poverty, the promotion of
good health, good governance and stable environment. These facilitate access to education and the participation of learners of all ages. Without first or simultaneously meeting these more favorable conditions, the goals of EFA cannot be achieved.

On behalf of the Ministry of Education of Thailand, I would like to take this opportunity to thank UNESCO Bangkok and UNICEF Bangkok for their efforts in organizing this workshop as a start of the EFA Mid-Decade Assessment. And, once again may I welcome you to Bangkok and wish you the great success in this five-day workshop.

Thank you.